THE PERICLEAN AGE OF GRECIAN DECORATIVE ART.

THE CHRYS-ELEPHANTINE WORKS, &c.

A SERIES of lectures on the Periclean and Alexandrian ages of Greek art is in course of delivery by Mr. Ralph N. Wornum, at the Government School of Design, to a crowded and miscellaneous audience—of the people, properly so called, all of whom, young and old, female and male, high and low, seem to listen throughout to the details of art with the closest attention. Such at least was the case on the evening of Friday, the 2nd, at the lecture whence the following notes were taken.

From the time of Pericles to Alexander the Great, rather more than a century, ornamental design in Greece itself was constantly progressing in richness and variety, perpetually exhibiting new and beautiful combinations, although, in Greece, the decorative arts never at any time attained that florid development which so conspicuously distinguishes the great works of Rome, in the beginning of the empire. In these, however, notwithstanding the beauty of the individual members, the whole effect was materially injured by the superabundance of detail, by the overloading of ornament, carried to such an excess in some monuments as scarcely to leave a single portion of plain surface. There is no repose for the eye in such works, and the effect becomes merely general. This is a want of judgment, and calls to mind the memorable reproof of Apelles to one of his pupils, who had painted a picture of Helen of Troy, and loaded her with ornaments:—"So!" said Apelles, because you could not paint her beautiful, you have made her rich!" However much the Romans merit such a rebuke, certainly the Greeks do not. In their art nothing was overloaded, some of the most beautiful being remarkable for the comparatively moderate application of ornament, at least till about the Roman Conquest, when the Greek artists probably themselves followed out their art in the Roman capital, and to the Roman taste.

Reviewing the development of ornamental art among the Greeks (as the lecturer had previously been doing with illustrated reference to the spiral, acanthus, guilloche, &c.), we find the first great efforts at Samos, then at Ephesus, Ægina, Athens, and Delphi, Pæstum, and Sicily. Athens finally triumphed through the fostering care of Pericles, and the great school which arose out of his efforts reached its utmost perfection in the time of Alexander. This is true not only of ornamental art, but of all other arts dependant on form and colour. The grand essential qualities of art developed in the works of Polygnotus and Phidias received their last refinements under the hands of Lysippus and Apelles, and their contemporaries.

Some idea was then given of the progress of the rivalry between the Doric in the west and the Ionic in the east; of the decorations of those temples in which both orders were combined—the Propylæa of Athens and Eleusis for example; of the finer monuments of both orders grouped together on the Acropolis, or citadel of Athens, and particularly of the Doric Parthenon, and the Ionic Erectheium. The probable general style of the polychromic embellishments of the Parthenon was illustrated by the restoration of Dr. Kugler of Berlin. The sanctuary, continued the lecturer, contained the goddess's statue, of gold and ivory, of most colossal proportions, the work of Phidias, and one of the greatest of those surprising and costly productions of the Greeks called chrys-elephantine, that is of gold and ivory, and of which Phidias alone executed six.

The Chrys-elephantine statue of Minerva, in the Parthenon, was about 40 feet high. The flesh was entirely of ivory, the costume of gold, and the ornaments of gold, colour, and precious stones. There have been many speculations as to how these ivory figures were constructed, and the eminent French antiquary, M. Quatremère de Quincy, has devoted an elaborate essay to this subject. Though ivory was much more abundant in ancient times than it is now, it is not to be for a moment supposed that these Chrys-elephantine figures were built entirely of ivory, even though hollow. The ivory was a mere outer casing, fixed in small pieces upon a core of wood, or perhaps some other material, skilfully prepared to receive it; and it was probably laid on in uniform thicknesses—not a very difficult process, when we consider that the Greeks were in possession of a method of softening their ivory. Plutarch mentions the softeners of ivory as one of the distinct classes of artists employed by Pericles, and these were the men probably employed to fix the ivory upon the core. Pausanias also mentions that the Greeks flattened the round pieces of elephants' tusks by first rendering them soft by heat—perhaps by steaming; and being then allowed to cool under pressure they might assume the required shape. When thus fixed the sculptor could fashion the various parts to his taste.

The great triumph of this species of art was the colossal sitting statue of Jupiter, in his temple at Olympia, in Elis, a cluster of temples in the plain where the great periodical games of the Greeks took place. This incomparable work was the masterpiece of Phidias, and, like the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the world. The lecturer then described this celebrated statue in the words of Pausanias, which, for the sake of some of our own readers, who may not be familiar with, or may wish to recall, the idea of this wonder of the ancient world, we may here also note down from the lecturer's description. The god was represented seated on his throne, under the covering of the temple, and the whole height of the statue, exclusive of the pedestal, is said to have been something more than 40 feet, an almost incredible magnitude, when we consider the material and the manner of its workmanship. It occupied Phidias and his assistants about four years, during the 80th Olympiad, or from 437 to 433 B.C., inclusive, and immediately after the completion of the Minerva of the Parthenon.

"The god," says Pausanias, "is seated on a throne made of ivory and gold. He wears a crown of olive branch on his head. In his right hand is the figure of Victory, also of gold and ivory, with a crown on her head, and holding a fillet. In his left hand he holds a beautiful sceptre set with all kinds of precious stones. The bird on the top of it is an eagle. His sandals are also of gold, and his mantle likewise, which is ornamented with figures of animals and lilies. The throne itself is variegated with gold, stones, ivory, and ebony, and is decorated with painted reliefs. It is adorned, also, with statues. At each foot or leg of the throne are four dancing victories, and two others on the pedestal of each foot. On (above?) the two front feet are Theban youths carried away by sphinxes, and below the sphinxes are Apollo and Diana, destroying the children of Niobe."

The charge of this statue, which remained at Olympia undisturbed for about 800 years, was given, in perpetuity, to the descendants of Phidias. Their duty was to keep it clean, and to rub it constantly with oil, to preserve the ivory from suffering any injury from the marshy atmosphere of the grove in which the temple stood. They were called Phaidruntæ, which means, literally, polishers or cleaners. They had still the care of it in the time of Pausanias, who visited Olympia 500 years after the death of Phidias. This great sculptor died in the year 432 B.C., not many months after the completion of this master-piece.

There seems to have been considerable difficulty in keeping these chrys-elephantine works in order, the great difficulty being the climate, though, in Greece, at Olympia, it was too damp, at Athens too dry. While the Olympian Jupiter required to be frequently anointed with oil, the Minerva of the Parthenon, on the lofty dry Acropolis of Athens, required to be constantly sprinkled with water. A work, however, of this class, also by Phidias, wholly free from these objections, was the statue of Esculapius at Epidaurus, which was placed immediately over a well, the evaporations from which maintained a constant degree of moisture in the atmosphere, and thus preserved the statue—a remedy as simple as efficacious.

The Olympian Jupiter is said, though not upon very authentic sources, to have been carried to Constantinople, by the orders of Theodosius the Great, and there to have perished, about a century afterwards, in the fire which consumed the Lauseion, in which it was placed, in the year 475.

After a cursory allusion to the still more gigantic bronze statue of Minerva Promachos, in the Acropolis at Athens, made from the spoils of Marathon, and forming the greatest of all the works of Phidias, the lecturer proceeded to explain, in detail, the various ornamental and other portions of Greek architecture previously alluded to, and especially with reference to the Erectheum, the distinction between the Attic and Ionic column and base, and other decorative contrasts and comparisons, in which the Ionic temple of Ephesus, and various other examples, were illustrated, the elements of the voluted and Corinthian orders of architecture at large described, and the progress of the Periclean age of decorative Greek art traced through its increasing tendency to richness and abundance of ornament, rather than chastity of principles, till the conquest of Asia introduced a taste for even oriental display, which steadily progressed till the time of Nero, when mere vermillion and gilding were preferred to the tasteful polychromy of the Parthenon, and carved scrolls or griffins, or other monstrous combinations, were substituted for the noble decorations of Phidias. A disquisition on dolphins, tritons, satyrs, fauns, and 'chimeras dire' then followed, with an account of the lavish expenditure of the Greeks on mural and other household decorations in the time of Alexander, who, according to Pliny, paid Apelles 50,000*l.* for a single picture of himself, as Jupiter Tonans. Then it was that artists had their golden age, even though at times compelled by threats and imprisonment, no less than by bribes and honour, to undertake their prized productions.

Where the artist was so much in request as in Greece, whether painter, sculptor, or architect, he took his social position accordingly, and many of the Greek artists assumed an extraordinary degree of consequence, being most sumptuous in their habits, indulging in a costliness of costume worthy of a Sybarite. Zeuxis and his rival Parrhasius, were notorious for ostentation and magnificence of dress. Zeuxis, latterly, even gave away his pictures, declaring that they were beyond all price, and he appeared in public with his name embroidered in letters of gold around the hem of his mantle. Parrhasius also always appeared in public with a golden head-dress and a purple robe. His sandals were bound by golden straps, and he carried a golden-headed staff otherwise richly decorated. Such was the appearance of a Greek painter in the time of Socrates; and though Parrhasius may have been somewhat extreme in his love of display—his dress rather according with our notions of regal costume than that of an artist—a man of such taste and eminence in art would never have made himself *ridiculous* by his costume; and doubtless, therefore, the splendour of his attire was quite justified by the fashions of his times.

When considered together with what we read of the gorgeous dress of the Sybarites, this shows us that the love of art, when once developed, spreads itself in all directions, impressing every object with its beneficial influence, not less those of use than those of luxury. The costly and gorgeous structures of the Greeks were not mere works of luxurious extravagance. Though the contrast between the palace of the prince and the cottage of the artificer may be great, we must recollect that whole villages of cottages have sometimes owed their very existence to the erection of one of these palaces. The prince cannot indulge in the gratification of his taste for splendour without at the same time, either directly or indirectly, gladdening the hearts of thousands of poor artificers; and we should look upon the greatest buildings not as monuments of the extravagance of luxury, but rather of the skill and industry of the artist.

THE YARBOROUGH MONUMENT, at Bembridge-down, east end of Isle of Wight, had its capping-stone placed on Monday week. The structure, which is an obelisk, is of Penryn granite, 75 feet high, 14 feet at the base, and 28 feet at the lower step. A lightning conductor passes through the centre. The panels for an inscription to the late Earl and Yacht-commodore, have not yet been filled up. The building, according to the *Hampshire Advertiser*, is to serve as a sea-mark, the site having been carefully selected to that end. Mr. Peter Rolt was the builder.

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